CHAPTER 11

FORMALISATION OF 'OPEN SPACE AS PUBLIC SPACE' IN ZONING

THE BELGIAN EXPERIENCE

HANS LEINFELDER (GHENT UNIVERSITY)

INTRODUCTION

Whereas Chapter 10 critically reflects on how people can insert their views in the decision-making phase in open space planning, the present chapter tries to link people's appreciation for open space with the key documents in which planning decisions are formalised: the zoning plans.

The reflection in the present chapter has been developed with the spatial context of Flanders, the northern part of Belgium, in mind. At first glance, this spatial context in terms of urbanisation is similar to that found in the Netherlands. But, looked at more carefully, the Flemish context clearly offers a more extreme form of residential, economic and commercial suburbanisation in ribbon patterns or just randomly scattered around in open space. The most striking and convincing feature is the amount of land per citizen in these Flemish urban complexes, i.e. areas determined by suburbanisation around (and commuting to) one of the nine Flemish urban agglomerations or the capital of Brussels. In Brussels, this ratio adds up to 0.53 ha per citizen compared with 0.33 in Frankfurt, 0.22 in Paris, less than 0.2 in Lille, London and the Ruhr region and 0.11 in the Dutch Randstad. In Flanders itself, the ratio varies between 0.3 in Mechelen and 1.27 in Hasselt-Genk, and illustrates the unrestrained process of suburbanisation (Kesteloot, 2003). However, 76 per cent of Flanders still remains open, varying from vast and fairly open rural areas at the fringes of Flanders to a mosaic of fragments of open space in the more urbanised centre between the cities of Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent (Cabus, 2001). Gulinck and Dortmans (1997) name these fragments of open space 'neo-rural fields' in an attempt to describe them in a more positive way than 'the space that remains'. Neo-rural fields are contiguous and unbuilt geographical units at any location, both basic units for the strategic survey of resources in metropolitan areas and building blocks for future land use and environmental planning.

It could almost be said that the concept of 'network urbanity' was invented with this Flemish spatial context in mind. This makes the spatial structure of Flanders,

and specifically its spatial planning policy towards these characteristic fragments of open space, an interesting subject of research and for this book since it has evolved in a sort of 'laboratory condition' of network urbanity. This observation also explains the focus of my own PhD research (Leinfelder, 2007): first, assessing how Flemish spatial planning policy has tried to gain control of the growing fragmentation of open space in the past and present; second, introducing alternative concepts for planning open space in an urbanised and still urbanising context.

The central concept used to scientifically address these two main research challenges was that of 'planning discourse' (both in its analytical sense as well as in its synthetic sense). Hajer (1995, p. 17) states that:

> any understanding of the state of the natural or the social environment is based on representations, and always implies a set of assumptions and (implicit) social choices that are mediated through an ensemble of specific discursive practices. Dynamics of [. . .] politics cannot be understood without taking apart the discursive practices that guide our perception of reality.

To get to the social and cognitive basis of these practices, the technique of discursive analysis has been developed. This makes it possible to study both the mutual interaction of societal processes that mobilise actors around certain themes and the specific ideas and concepts that contribute to a common understanding of problems. Policy discourses analysed in political science and public management science differ from other discourses such as the everyday discourses in people's normal conversations or discourses that find their way to society through the media. Hajer (1995, p. 4) defines a policy discourse as 'a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social relations'. A more specific definition was given by Arts *et al.* (2000, p. 63): '[Policy discourses are] dominant interpretative schemes, ranging from formal policy concepts to popular story lines, by which meaning is given to a policy domain.'

Since spatial planning is a specific policy domain, planning discourses are specific policy discourses. Hidding *et al.* (1998) described a planning discourse as a more or less coherent ensemble of ideas about the spatial organisation of society that is being constructed and reconstructed in an interaction between researchers, planners, designers, policy makers, politicians and interest groups. More recently, De Jong (2006) stated that a planning discourse is about how societal groups and individuals look at and give meaning to their surroundings,

but it is also about what they wish and hope for concerning their future living environment.

Van Tatenhove *et al.* (2000) considered three elements to be essential to the development of a policy discourse: the creation of a story line, the development of a discourse coalition and finally institutionalisation into policy practices (Chapters 2 and 8 in this volume are illustrations thereof).

- A story line is a creative story – in the case of a planning discourse a conceptual complex (Zonneveld, 2001) – that enables actors to combine notions, categories and story lines from very different policy domains and to give meaning to specific physical and social phenomena.
- Discourse coalitions develop when previously independent policy practices and domains are actively connected or acquire meaning within a common political project. Members of a discourse coalition can be active in different professional fields and do not have to know each other personally. What unifies them and offers them political strength is that they gather around this one specific story line.
- A policy discourse becomes institutionalised when a story line and the corresponding discourse coalition are adapted to policy practices, legislation and reforms of governmental organisation. A discourse can eventually become dominant because individuals may lose their credibility if they do not use the ideas, concepts and categories of the discourse involved. Changes in policy are possible only when dominant policy discourses are being questioned.

This chapter elaborates on two of these three elements. The first section analyses the historical evolution of the story line and the institutionalisation of planning discourses regarding the countryside in Flemish spatial planning policy. The decades-long dominance of one specific planning discourse seems to be very comparable to other planning systems in northwestern Europe. The second section describes challenging alternative story lines regarding the development of multifunctional open space in urbanising contexts. It is an in-depth exploration of the conceptual ideas behind a potential story line of 'open space as public space'. In the third section of this chapter, the compatibility or incompatibility of the traditional monofunctional zoning of open space for land use with the alternative story line of 'open space as public space' is critically assessed. Finally, the fourth section elaborates on a more flexible type of zoning (strategic zoning according to purpose) to tackle this story line.

Dominance of a planning discourse about the countryside

The evolving story line about the development of the countryside in Flanders and its institutionalisation were reconstructed at three decisive moments in Flemish planning policy: during the design of the zoning plans in the period 1960–80, during the development of the strategic Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders in the period 1980–2000 and after 2000 in the delineation of parts of the natural and agricultural structure as part of the implementation of the structure plan. All relevant studies (interim or otherwise) and visionary and political documents at the national and regional (Flanders) levels have been analysed chronologically regarding their story line. The institutionalisation of discourses has been approached through the analysis of urbanistic rules and/or explanatory documents concerning these rules.

Design of zoning plans (1960–80)

In the 1960s, the Belgian federal government decided to design zoning plans to deal with the chaotic situation which existed at that time. This chaos had two causes: the building permit regulations from the first coordinated law on urbanism (1962) and the lack of planning initiatives by local authorities. These zoning plans were originally conceived as informal directive plans, but ended up becoming statutory zoning plans on a scale of 1/10,000.

The discursive analysis showed that the policy documents that preceded the final zoning plans of the 1970s stressed a normative distinction between the new urban and industrial society to come and the former rural society. 'Open space' was considered to be residual space for future urban and economic development and for recreational activities of active city dwellers. The 'rural areas' in the draft zoning plans were nothing more than the area that remained after delineating the zones for urban functions, nature conservation and forestry. Furthermore, the actual territorial differences between the role and position of rural areas in their relationship to urban areas were hardly addressed in the zoning plans. In the final zoning plans, land use was allocated in a very monofunctional way: specific functions and activities were assigned to zones where other functions and activities – even those typical for the countryside – were excluded.

Development of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders (1980–2000)

Owing to the second phase of the Belgian constitutional reform in 1980, spatial planning became a regional competence. The Flemish government appeared to

take its new task seriously; to be able to respond to the growing need to review zoning plans, the development of a Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders was seen as a political priority. During the first half of the 1980s, a planning group immediately produced two interesting conceptual documents, but it was only in 1992 that a new external planning group, which included academics and professionals, really began preparing a structure plan. In 1997, the first Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2004) was approved by parliament as an indicative and minimally binding strategic policy document; it was essentially a framework for spatial planning policy at the different policy levels in Flanders.

The preparatory documents and the final Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders expressed a continuing need for a normative distinction between urban and rural areas. The final plan, for instance, stated that the actual situation in Flanders definitely did not meet the image of clearly defined urban and rural areas. Its overall visionary slogan 'Flanders, open and urban' was, however, crystallised into urban policy that aimed for development, concentration and densification of activities in urban areas and in a rural policy that was extremely reserved concerning new developments in the 'countryside' and that specifically favoured nature, agriculture and forestry.

It is worth mentioning that the binding statement which describes the countryside as 'that which remains when the urban areas are delineated' seemed to be copied/pasted from preparatory documents for the zoning plans from some 25 years before. It could be said that the idea of delineating urban areas was an undisputed constant during the political decision-making process of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders. In sharp contrast, the complementary idea of delineating the countryside disappeared from the draft of the structure plan and was reoriented towards the delineation of 'parts of the natural and agricultural structure'. In other words, the concept of the countryside as an entity – with distinctions based on qualitative physical, economic, social and cultural characteristics – was abandoned, and there was a shift towards viewing the countryside as an accumulation of spatial entities for various land uses. Briefly summarised, planning policy again opted for a functional differentiation.

Delineation of parts of the natural and agricultural structure

The delineation of parts of the natural and agricultural structure (the implementation of the spatial structure plan) did not proceed at all smoothly. Several attempts had already stranded at an early stage when comprehensive planning processes were set up in 2003 for a total of 13 rural areas. Objectives, spatial concepts and

action programmes were defined in time and energy consuming processes, and did not yet result in a proportional number of zoning plans.

This delineation was the institutionalisation of the story line of the structure plan, and led to similar results. First, the political distinction between urban areas and the countryside was legally formalised in the form of a line or contour around the urban areas in a zoning plan. Next, since the fear of new spatial developments in the countryside remained, it was expressed in the urbanistic rules of the zoning plans. Even in those areas that were already densely urbanised, only tourism and recreational activities were allowed in the form of low-dynamic revalorisation of heritage elements, and biking and hiking. In addition, a few new functions and activities were made possible in old farmhouses. This, however, should not be considered as a well thought-out modification in spatial planning, but merely as a timid attempt of spatial planning policy to recover the control it had lost through some preceding generic changes in building permit policy.

Dominance of a planning discourse of separation between city and countryside

Analysis of documents over this 45-year period show the continuing dominance of a discourse in Flemish planning policy that considered and considers city and countryside – urban areas and rural areas – as functionally and morphologically separate and opposite. While the discourse of the first two decades still encompassed a feeling of urban superiority over rurality, the story line in the last 25 years has focused on an almost opposite but complementary approach to urban and rural areas.

The dominance of this planning discourse is not unique to the planning policy of Flanders. In Great Britain, for instance, policy is dictated by strong conservative public opinion regarding the countryside (see Chapter 4 in this volume), ranging from aristocrats obsessed with fox hunting to NIMBY enthusiasts campaigning against every new development in the vicinity. This conservatism is also solidly institutionalised in legislation such as the Agriculture Act and the Town and Country Planning Act. As a result of a large demonstration in London in 1998, MacFarlane (1998:18) stated:

> The rural is a category of thought. The countryside is not a place, it is an idea.

And, almost since time immemorial, Dutch planning policy has striven for a similar 'planning doctrine', indirectly pursuing conservation of the countryside by urban densification or 'intension' – the opposite of urban 'extension' (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994; Van der Valk, 2002).

The findings of the European RURBAN knowledge exchange project expressed a strong cultural determination in the perception of the relationship between city and countryside (Overbeek, 2006). The comparable perception of this city–countryside conflict in Flanders, Great Britain and the Netherlands seems typical for most northwestern European countries with a rural tradition that focuses on agriculture and/or nature. In these regions, countryside is highly appreciated as a space for production and consumption, and cities and urban pressure are negatively perceived. Conversely, the Mediterranean rural tradition approaches the countryside somewhat negatively, so that cities and urbanisation are perceived as positive because they stimulate economic development.

Challenging story lines of potential alternative discourses

After 40 years, the validity of the story line of the dominant planning discourse on cities and countryside as opposites is under pressure. Although people still symbolically conceive of space in these two spatial categories, society and government are no longer capable of producing this symbolic space in a physical and social way. City, a morphological phenomenon, and urbanity, its societal counterpart, are increasingly claiming the countryside or parts of it. In the countryside, agriculture and rurality are losing their dominant character. There is no longer a solid physical, social or cultural repertory that allows the linking of functions and activities one-to-one to the predicates 'urban' and 'rural'. In addition, by obstinately clinging to these two simple categories, any complex and multilayered spatial reality is ignored (as Chapter 2 in this volume shows). The top-down uniformising planning discourse no longer makes sense. In an urbanising spatial context (in Flanders and elsewhere), it is time to evaluate the potential of alternative story lines about the spatial development of the countryside in relation to urbanity.

Inspired by the first observations on alternative planning discourses by Hidding *et al.* (1998), three story lines about the relationship between city and countryside were explored in design approaches for various urbanising parts of Flanders. The artificial normative distinction of city and countryside was no longer a starting point; other logic prevailed in the spatial analysis and design. The story line of city and countryside 'as a network of activities' focused on the socio-economic network relationships that make it possible to abstract any border. In the ecosystem story line, spatial relationships were approached through the hydrological and ecological dynamics of the underlying physical structure. Finally, the story line of city and countryside as 'systems of places' emphasised the increasing public functioning of space, and the meaning that places acquire within society.

These three design exercises showed primarily that a need existed for a planning scale situated between the scale of the individual parcel and that of the region. It is also at this intermediate scale that new complementary entities were defined: high and low dynamic entities in the 'network of activities' story line, vulnerable and non-vulnerable entities in the ecosystem story line and meaningful entities and entities with little meaning in the 'system of places' story line. The introduction of these spatial entities involved a twofold process of spatial planning. Within the entities, functions and activities were conditionally harmonised; in between the entities, there was a more positional harmonisation. The conditional harmonisation particularly benefited from a clear definition of contextual conditions for development – concerning dynamics, impact on the physical structure and the addition to or destruction of the meaning of a place. These contextual conditions should be considered as the framework in which functions and activities can develop.

The 'network of activities' and the ecosystem story lines appear to have already filtered down into current spatial planning policy for the countryside. This took place through the safeguarding of economic development perspectives for agriculture and through the realisation of ecological networks. What seems to be missing, however, especially in an urbanising context, is a broader socio-cultural positioning of the countryside. That is why one potential role of open space (that of fulfilling a societal role as public space) is discussed in more detail as a sub-story line within that of city and countryside as 'a system of places'.

Societal context of the story line 'open space as public space'

The alternative story line of 'open space as public space' was inspired by one of the main socio-cultural challenges in contemporary network society: learning to cope with 'the other', with diversity and differences. This pluralistic ambition, this positive tolerance, is a more realistic perspective than the feverish search for the utopian ideal of 'community' (Lofland, 1998; Sandercock, 1998). Such an ambition does not even require that individuals or societal groups really meet – simply observing 'the other' will often suffice to gain knowledge about the other's value and it is this knowledge that is essential for the creation of trust and the necessary social capital in society (Madanipour, 2003).

In a spatial context, 'public space' is the ultimate medium to meet this socio-cultural challenge, to confront the one with the other.

> It is impossible for me to see the world entirely from the viewpoint of another person and I am not able to enter the private realm of strangers and experience life from their perspective. I can, however, albeit in a narrow sense, have the same perspectives as they might have in public space. I can stand where they stood and experience common space from the same perspective, even though my experience may be completely different.
>
> (Madanipour, 2003, p. 165)

Consequently, creating public space that is accessible and useful to a varied group of people – so that confrontation can take place – is and will remain one of the main tasks of spatial planning. However, the academic debate about the societal importance of public space is predominantly focused on urban public space. Central to the discussion is the decline of the 'real' central urban public space, with a striking division between those who romantically strive for the restoration of original agora-like places and those who search for germs of contemporary types of public space in the increasingly individualised and alienated network society. These new public spaces (shopping malls, theme parks, university campuses, etc.), especially those in urban fringes, are capable of combining the growing mobility in society with the exchange of knowledge between mutually uninformed societal groups. These 'parishes' have the potential to evolve into places with agoral characteristics, since cultural heterogeneity increases through the temporary presence of passers-by (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001; Van der Wouden, 2002).

In a context in which most of the space in Flanders is 'urban', fragments of open space also seem to be able to fulfil a role as public space.

An initial argument in favour of this idea is the growing diversity among users of open space and the meanings they give it. A large group of users nostalgically glorify the fragments of open space as the lost paradise, characterised by features such as space, peace and darkness, which seem to be lost in network society. A rural idyll is being projected onto rural society and agriculture. For these users, the countryside has become a refuge from modernity and is defended against every thinkable development (Short, 1991, quoted in Halfacree, 2004). At the same time, some of the population, especially the younger generation looking for entertainment, thinks of space, quietness and darkness as boring. They want open space as a green setting for experiences and fun; they 'consume' the countryside as an extension of the urban public space that has already fallen victim to entertainment. 'Thematisation' and 'spectacularisation' are no longer exclusively urban phenomena, and adopt newly specified names such as 'agritainment' or 'entertainment farming' (Metz, 2002).

These extremes illustrate that, in the countryside as well as in the city, network society has resulted in social fragmentation. Mutual understanding of one another's activities, social relationships and mobilising capacity based on shared values and needs has become scarce; this – also in the open space – gives rise

to mutual intolerance. In other words, rural society cannot escape from the challenge of restoring and strengthening social capital (Amdam, 2006).

Finally, in an urbanising society, fragments of open space increasingly become morphological equivalents of the unbuilt public space within cities. However, where the urban public space has been kept free as a concept in a solid vision on the functioning of a city, the enclaves of open space are often accidental and thus the unstructured remains after urbanisation. Nevertheless, the conception and development of both have to be well thought out in order to fulfil their public role in society. Gallent *et al.* (2004) and Halfacree (2004), for instance, emphasised the uniqueness and non-transitory character of these fragments of open space due to their recreational, aesthetic and identifying qualities that contribute to the living environment of the urban dweller.

Planning concepts of the story line 'open space as public space'

In this story line, fragments of open space are no longer residual spaces but become structuring spatial elements for further urbanisation. This causes a drastic change in the overall perception of urban spatial development, moving from an autonomously growing city that gradually squanders the countryside towards a consciously designed urban agglomeration in which open space is considered a basic ingredient. A story line of 'open space as public space' has to be understood as one possible role that could be assigned to fragments of open space in an urbanising environment.

Furthermore, this story line does not imply an underestimation or substitution of the existing urban public space. It assumes the addition of public space and, consequently, gives relief to the extremely occupied traditional public space. However, to be clear, the pleasing sound of 'public open space' varnishes over its shortcomings, since it ignores the crucial fact that 'public open space' can never become public space in the sense of being a public good, owned by the state and at the service of everyone. In addition, in future the majority of open space will be owned by private owners who are confronted with the fact that their open space and the activities that take place in it are 'consumed' by a growing number of users. They will, to a greater or lesser degree, provide access to this open space and/or tolerate other users. In this context, it seems more appropriate to use ideas such as 'collective space' and 'shared space'.

Based on a research project looking for the critical success factors in the design of green public spaces in large urban agglomerations all over the world (e.g. Central Park in New York), Tummers and Tummers-Zuurmond (1997) determined that three common factors are present:

- the green public space occupies a piece of land with sufficient size and permanent status;
- the fringe of the green public space is occupied by buildings;
- a special building is situated on the periphery of the green public space.

On further consideration, these three success factors for green public space seem to have the potential of being more essential to the spatial visioning about fragments of open space in an urbanising spatial context (in Flanders and elsewhere) than the current functional and technically inspired delineation of parts of the natural and agricultural structure.

The first success factor is the presence of a space with a size that is in proportion to the surrounding urban tissue. Moreover, its continuity in time has to be guaranteed politically as well as socially.

If translated into the planning and design of public open space in an urbanising context, this success factor can be applied at different scales. Given the historical average of a distance of 5 km in between Flemish villages, the typical radial urbanisation along the connection roads between villages results in fragments of open space with a size that is proportionally relative to the urbanised environment. Smaller fragments are often in proportion to smaller communities nearby; some agricultural parcels are in proportion to the typical Flemish 'spread-out' or linear residential development. As an example of this concept on a national scale, the Green Heart in the Netherlands – because of its size – operates as an open space for the city dwellers in the surrounding cities of the Randstad.

The permanent status of a fragment of open space is very contextual. For example, it is physically impossible to build on some fragments (such as those in river beds). This means their continuity over time is almost automatically assured. The societal and cultural value of castle parks, important natural areas or protected landscapes is so high that the risk of them being built upon is quite small. The economic, ecological or cultural value of the largest number of fragments of open space, however, especially those in agricultural use, is not enough to guarantee their openness over time. In such cases, permanence has to be 'created', for example by means of their public role in an urbanising society, or artificially by means of zoning plans.

The second success factor is the design of a built fringe around the fragment of open space. The urban functions and activities in this fringe use the open space – either in actual terms or visually – and are an important guarantee for the conservation of the open space in the long term.

In an urbanising context (in Flanders or elsewhere), the element of a built fringe is already present in the form of residential and other developments in the urban fringe or in the network urbanity of smaller villages and communities, ribbon and

spread-out development. What seems to be missing, however, is the functional and/or visual orientation of the buildings towards the open space. For the most part, urban extension takes place with its back to the open space. Urban extension is essentially an introverted process, specifically oriented towards the urban centre and the urban public space, and much less so towards the attractive, open space that surrounds it. It thus fails to mobilise the people's affection for open spaces central to Chapter 10 and 12.

These observations lead to recommendations concerning the design of the contact area between the open space and the built fringe. Important elements are, of course, 'windows' or 'vistas' that facilitate the view from the private space in the built fringe to the regional open space, and the reverse. But the contact area is also a potential agoral space, where the residential passer-by from the built fringe – who sleeps in between his or her commuting and professional activities – encounters the societal groups rooted in the countryside (for instance, farmers). For this purpose, the contact area could also be explicitly 'designed' as a sort of common ground for activities that attract both farmers and residential dwellers: allotment gardens, school gardens, composting grounds, etc.

The third and final success factor in making an open space a real public space is the location of a special building in a peripheral position that unifies the public open space and the built fringe. The building and the activities in the building attract people from the fringe and beyond and stimulate them to further explore the open space.

This concept also provides interesting and innovative perspectives for open space in urbanising contexts. Whereas the location of a bench or playground in a public square determines the latter's functional possibilities, similar dynamics can be expected in open space with the insertion of recreational services (such as children's farm or forest), sport infrastructure (such as a golf course), cultural activities (such as an open air museum) or, at a very detailed scale, a bench on the periphery of certain parcels in agricultural use. The most important challenge is to attune the attractiveness of the new element to the degree of public character wanted for the piece of open space involved.

The overall relevance of this story line is that it no longer attempts to legitimise the conservation of open space from a merely economic (agricultural) or ecological (nature) point of view. It offers an innovative composite of planning concepts that accommodate a socio-cultural positioning of open space in urbanising contexts.

INCOMPATIBILITY OF 'OPEN SPACE AS PUBLIC SPACE' AND TRADITIONAL ZONING

Since the forestation index in Flanders was, and still is, very low by European standards, an overall challenge of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders was to achieve 10,000 ha of forestation in the period 1997–2007. Because this objective has not been met at all at the scale of Flanders, an extensive planning process has been initiated to realise 300 ha of mature forest in the southern fringe of the urban agglomeration of Ghent, the second largest city in Flanders and one of its least forested regions. This original forestation idea has been integrated into the aim of creating a 1200 ha 'urban landscape park', a multifunctional area with a dominantly open character, situated in and surrounded by a strongly urbanised region (David *et al.*, 2005).

The planning vision for the so-called 'Park Forest Ghent' (see Figure 11.1; Studiegroep Omgeving *et al.*, 2001) integrates the fragment of open space quite uniquely within the urban structure and therefore serves as an example of Flemish 'rural' planning policy. This is also a legal distinction, since it is located inside the delineation of the Ghent urban area. The implicit assumption of this strategy is that the fragment of open space can more successfully withstand future urbanisation pressure by making it part of urbanisation instead of excluding it from this process.

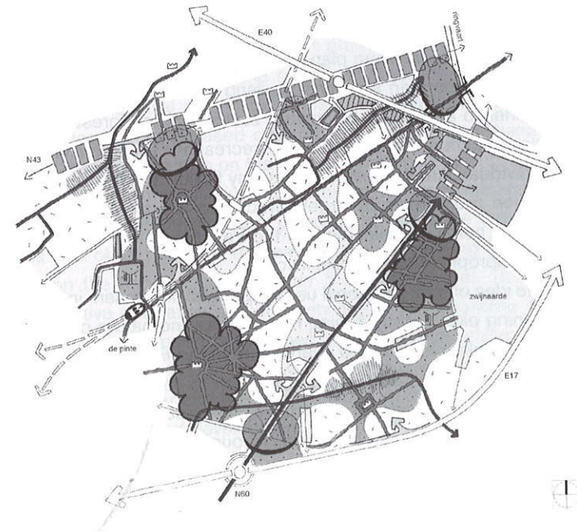

Figure 11.1 Park Forest Ghent.

Evaluating the Park Forest vision in relation to the three success factors shows that it generally meets the story line of 'open space as public space' as described in the second section of this chapter. The size of the Park Forest is in proportion to the Ghent urban area and its permanent status as open space is virtually guaranteed by the delineation in the zoning plan. The realisation of its public role will be reinforced in the short term through the location of some new contextual elements such as biking and hiking paths, reception infrastructure and minor forestation projects. Major roles have been assigned to passive recreation, nature conservation, forestry and agriculture, and secondary roles to economic development, more active recreation and residential activities. In other words, recreation-seeking city dwellers, businesses, sportsmen and new inhabitants are added to the existing societal groups/parishes of the fragment of open space with the idea that a multifunctional use will stimulate the confrontation between societal groups in public open space. New functions and activities in existing castles, the development perspectives for agro-tourism and the concept of four park entrances are compatible with the idea of attractors. What is missing in the planning vision, however, is a concept for a built fringe making use of the open space. Other than the idea of a new university science park in the northeast corner of the forest, the relationship between the Park Forest and the residential development in the outskirts of Ghent and in the three villages bordering the Park Forest is not taken into consideration at all.

What is striking, however, is that the potential of the planning vision to create a public open space at the scale of the Ghent urban area is seriously encumbered when it is translated into a zoning plan.

In the first place, the plan allocates the land use within the Park Forest in a traditional manner to accurately delineated zones such as forest areas, agricultural areas, castle park areas and areas for recreation. These are defined at the level of the individual parcel. In other words, any flexibility in the actual realisation of the forestation programme is largely precluded. Consequently, the addition of necessary new contextual elements to the Park Forest will need a very active government to expropriate the parcels involved.

Second, the idea of multifunctional use is sporadically present in the urbanistic rules of the zoning plan. Hiking, biking, horse riding and nature conservation are the only uses officially safeguarded everywhere in the Park Forest. Although the option of a very directive government in relation to recreational developments in the open space seems acceptable, this option also makes appropriate recreational activities impossible by definition. Through this allocation at the level of individual parcels, various societal groups are forced into a legal straitjacket that refers to land use. This sharply contrasts with societal self-organisation – or the development of social capital (see Chapter 10 in this volume) – that is, or should

be, so characteristic of the realisation of public space, in this case public open space.

> Landscape multifunctionality stands in sharp contrast to the dominant 'single objective' planning of the past.
>
> (Selman, 2006, p. 15)

More and more often, the deeply rooted practice of zoning according to land use in the planning of open space seems to have met its limits. Spatial planners are educated to think in terms of blueprints and have developed planning instruments that are often unable to cope with the dynamics of society. Saey (2005) attributed this focus on land use zoning to a shift in the objectives of spatial planning towards the prevalence of land use over purpose, or legal security having priority over the well being of people. However, Van Dooren (1999) stated that the challenge in contemporary network society is shifting from hardware to software and orgware, meaning that the question of spatial development deals no longer with zoning, land use and solidified space, but increasingly with the use of space and with the direction and organisation of spatial development.

TOWARDS A MORE FLEXIBLE INSTITUTIONALISATION THROUGH ZONING ACCORDING TO PURPOSE

The academic debate in Flemish and Dutch planning theory and practice regarding alternatives for traditional zoning based on land use is polarised and thus oversimplified. An artificial distinction is made between 'passive', permit-based planning practice – zoning based on land use – on the one hand and 'active' development planning practice on the other. In traditional zoning, the government waits for others to take the initiative and passively directs development through its building permit policy. In development planning, however, the government actively cooperates with other parties in the realisation and financing of a plan (for more information on the concept, see Chapter 5 in this volume). This improves the degree of effective realisation and creativity, but in the meantime it can result in undemocratic decision-making processes, an ambiguous governmental position and a larger dependency on the good will of others. It is to their credit that Needham (2003) and Buitelaar and Needham (2005) invariably took the position that permit-based planning and development planning are mutually dependent, albeit with a slight advantage for permit-based planning because of the continuous need to attune the divergent ideas of different stakeholders regarding the development of a region. Consequently, they have suggested embedding development planning in permit-based planning.

This suggestion offers new perspectives in the search for a more flexible institutionalisation of the alternative spatial conceptual approaches of open space in an urbanising context, as described in the preceding sections of this chapter. This section explores the possibilities of manipulating the instrument of the zoning plan to tackle the multiple use and multiple meaning of open space in an urbanising society in a more efficient and result-oriented way. The content, growth and legal status of such a 'strategic zoning plan' for the open space will now be addressed.

Content of a strategic zoning plan for open space

Ultimately, spatial planning is always territorial, so there is no getting away from zoning (Zonneveld, 2005). Even when a plan focuses on a textual description of the future spatial development, the area that is being addressed by this description has to be, in one way or another, geographically defined. What is more important in turning a zoning plan into a more strategic policy document is whether or not this zoning still needs to allocate land use.

Taking into account the future public role of the Park Forest Ghent as described above, the zoning in a strategic zoning plan needs to find inspiration in the possible differences in intended socio-cultural meanings of relevant entities within the Park Forest. In this context, the urbanistic rules of the zoning plan should not define which land uses are or are not allowed in the different entities. Instead, the rules should explicitly define the purposes: which existing spatial contextual elements have to be safeguarded and what are the conditions for adding new contextual elements to guarantee that the Park Forest can act as a public open space for divergent societal groups? In practice, these contextual elements can be clearly related to certain land uses, but do not always have to be defined in the urbanistic rules. As such, it actually doesn't matter what land uses will develop in the entity involved – as long as the purposes and contextual conditions are being respected.

> Public authorities and planners often claim to preserve land for agricultural purposes when in fact, the real motive is preserving open space that will fulfil multiple functions.
>
> (Meyer-Cech and Seher, 2005, p. 1)

Similarly, each of the design exercises for the story lines of the three potential alternative discourses regarding the relationship between city and countryside – briefly addressed in the second section of this chapter – end by distinguishing relevant spatial entities: high and low dynamic entities, vulnerable and non-vulnerable entities, meaningful entities and entities with little meaning. Significantly, the development perspectives of these entities are not directly linked to land uses. They are loaded with contextual conditions concerning dynamics, environmental impact or contribution to the public character that have to be met by possible land uses for the area concerned.

A strategic zoning plan for open space should succeed in the zoning of an area in those entities that refer to the purpose of the open space as intended by society. The nomenclature of these zones should therefore express the most relevant desired features of these entities, rather than the desired land use; for example 'agricultural area', 'nature reserve', 'residential area'. In this context, it is appropriate to refer to De Graaf and Lust (2004), who discussed a form of 'narrative spatial planning' characterised by language, metaphors, figurative language and choice of words in an elegant mix with images, maps and diagrams.

In addition, the urbanistic rules of strategic zoning plans should primarily define the contextual conditions or 'rules of the game' that form the framework for spatially qualitative developments and actions. These plans invite society to act as if they are giving directions for the spatial development of an area; they unify needs that are often contradictory by focusing on a limited number of themes (Verwest *et al.*, 2005).

A strategic zoning plan for open space essentially implies that development and management of space overshadow the traditional leading planning principle of allocation of land use. Undoubtedly, strategic zoning plans imply a limitation of the high and idealistic hopes concerning the legal security of spatial planning. At first sight, strategic zoning plans for open space also seem to stress the quality of the open spaces (more than in the past), as a determining factor in spatial planning and design.

> We have become increasingly aware that landscape contributes centrally to people's quality of life, and thus requires a more systematic and geographically comprehensive approach than simply preserving the prettiest areas for those fortunate enough to be able to gaze on them. [. . .] Landscape planning policies have tended to be expert-driven and strongly influenced by 'polite' tastes. [. . .] It is now abundantly clear that landscape scale planning must be a far more positive activity, and one which centrally involves stakeholders in choices and stewardships.
>
> (Selman, 2006, pp. 1 and 180)

Growth of a strategic zoning plan for open space

It is pointless to develop a zoning plan that tries to capture the meaning or socio-cultural meaning of open space in territorial zoning and urbanistic rules when, afterwards, this 'institutionalised meaning' finds no response at all in society. For this purpose, the development of a strategic zoning plan for open space needs to be subject to discussion and dialogue between all stakeholders (present or future). It is obvious that such a zoning plan should be a product of integrated and area-oriented/territorial decision-making processes. Furthermore, the exploration of the story lines of potential alternative discourses on the relationship of city and countryside also made it clear that planning and design should be situated at an intermediate scale relevant to the contextual focus. At this scale, stakeholders should be well aware of the qualities, problems, characteristics and meanings of the open space and should be well prepared to discuss and act in a temporary or more permanent way. Voets and De Rynck (2006) called this form of decision making in planning 'inter-organisational area-oriented collaboration', which is expressed in 'regional arrangements': temporary and permanent forms of collaboration, formal or informal, in which, based on a problem definition for a certain area, all relevant public and private stakeholders who can contribute to a solution are involved to influence policy-making and implementation.

At a national policy level, such as that of Flanders, it is possible to formulate only a very generic policy framework or an unpretentious territorial one that merely stresses possible story lines for larger regions. However, these generic objectives either do not offer qualitative solutions to specific problems in a region, or do so only inefficiently or unsatisfactorily. Therefore, the story line and its institutionalisation can only be elaborated upon in more detail for a specific area, for instance for the Park Forest at the level of the urban area of Ghent or for a fragment of open space at the local level.

Whereas the current spatial planning practices in Flanders impose very hierarchical standards in a top-down fashion, this strategic planning approach implies a more decentralised network control, an interaction and dialogue between involved public and private stakeholders, a broader – also socio-cultural – development perspective and a facilitating government that formulates the conditions for change. The strategic zoning plan is no more than the expression of a so-called strategic project that anticipates the organising and learning capacity of society – its social capital.

> In a learning situation, any attempt to specify the end result is inappropriate, if for no other reason than that by definition the end state cannot be known. Rather, the plan needs to be a flexible document capable of guiding the process and of evolving alongside with it.
>
> (Faludi, 2000, p. 302)

The statutory nature of a strategic zoning plan for open space

Because of the still dominant stress on zoning based on land use, the average zoning plan in Flanders is still a classic 'blueprint' plan produced at the end of a planning process. The plan expresses what the government thinks the physical space will look like at a certain moment in the future and describes which measures should be taken to achieve this final vision.

In contrast, a strategic zoning plan for open space defines a less specific future vision and functions more as an indicative and temporary frame of reference in the course of a planning process, forming the basis for the coordination of decision making on projects and other measures. It has a more informal character and addresses binding agreements between public and private stakeholders about the development of open space without being an inflexible formal framework. Van Ark (2005) called it a decision-oriented planning approach.

> The immediate object [of planning] is not 'society', 'social problems', 'social development', or such like. The planning object in the sense of that which planning is concerned with is the set of decisions and actions that are being coordinated by means of a plan. We sharply distinguish this planning object from the material object, the problems in the outside world that the plan relates to.
>
> (Faludi, 2000, p. 306)

In a similar vein, Van den Broeck noted the importance of people's decision making to the planning process.

> Planners and designers like to believe in the notion that 'plans' can change reality. From a historical point of view and from experience, we should be aware that people constitute the crucial factor in planning and that implementation is the objective.
>
> (Van den Broeck, 2006, p. 12)

The vision of this decision-oriented planning approach on the performance of plans differs from prevailing ideas in planning practice. It is not so much the degree to which the results in the field correspond to the plan that determines the performance of the plan, but the way in which the plan affects the working

of society. Consequently, it is not so important if a plan is not respected. The effectiveness of a strategic zoning plan is determined specifically by the use value of the plan as a basis at the moment of decision making in concrete situations, even when these situations are different from those in place when the plan was developed (Van Ark, 2005).

A strategic zoning plan is only one part of a more comprehensive territorial contract with mutual obligations between private and public parties about the development of a specific open space. In such voluntary contracts, measures and projects need to be goal-oriented and formulated in measurable 'result commitments' in combination with agreements on the bundling of sectoral instruments. The strategic zoning plan, given its specific focus on the spatial dimension, is only one part of this process. In most cases, however, the territorial contract also consists of other dimensions.

Territorial contracts do not replace other planning instruments, but are extremely complementary to them (Van Ark, 2005). Since the territorial contracts are voluntary contracts, commitments or standards to be met are not legally enforceable. They are relational contracts with rules on behaviour and arbitration. A strategic zoning plan for open space, which defines urbanistic rules in the form of contextual conditions to be used to evaluate developments in the open space, seems perfectly compatible with the idea of such relational contracts.

Conclusion

The history of planning for open space in Flanders shows a bias towards economic and ecological objectives, when planning for agriculture and nature. In contrast, the socio-cultural dimension of open space is under-exposed in planning processes for open space. The cultural and societal meaning of open space in the urbanising society, in Flanders and elsewhere, is ignored. Boomkens (1999) noted that even the most general notions in spatial planning, the notions of 'city' and 'countryside', have become subject to debate and seem to constantly change in meaning, which proves that the debate on urbanisation and spatial planning has become increasingly fundamental. The debate also includes our way of living and our culture as a whole.

Hajer (1996) suggested that spatial planning should focus no longer on 'space' but on 'place'. Such spatial planning deals with qualities and differences between places, especially concerning their societal reality. The task of government is to provide society – through spatial design and other methods – with several alternative visions of spatial development and corresponding societal implementation trajectories. It is then society itself that, through its actions, selects the most appropriate trajectories.

More fundamentally, it seems that the search for the most appropriate mutual adaptation of space and society, which is the classic object of spatial planning and consequently the primary task of the spatial planner, should shift towards the objective of freeing space for the fulfilment of societal needs. It should do so by defining a more flexible policy towards new developments, albeit within contextual conditions formulated beforehand.

References

Amdam, J. (2006) Communicative planning in rural areas. Paper at the 2nd World Planning Schools Congress 'Planning for diversity and multiplicity: a new agenda for the world planning community', Global Planning Education Association Network, Mexico City, 12–16 July.

Arts, B., Van Tatenhove, J. and Leroy, P. (2000) Policy arrangements. In J. Van Tatenhove, B. Arts and P. Leroy (eds) *Political modernisation and the environment, the renewal of environmental policy arrangements*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 53-69.

Boomkens, R. (1999) 'Van de grote stad ging een onbestemde dreiging uit', hoe grootstedelijk is Nederland?. In R. Van der Wouden (ed.) *De stad op straat, de openbare ruimte in perspectief*. Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, pp. 63–80.

Buitelaar, E. and Needham, B. (2005) De retoriek voorbij. *Stedenbouw & Ruimtelijke Ordening* 86(1): 62–65.

Cabus, P. (2001) Nood aan een nieuw stedelijk model? De compacte stad onder vuur. *Ruimte & Planning* 21(1): 2–8.

David, P., Vanhaeren, R. and Vloebergh, G. (2005) Planningshistoriek van het Parkbosproject. In G. Allaert and H. Leinfelder (eds) *Parkbos Gent, over visievorming en beleidsnetwerking*. Gent: Academia Press, pp. 7–28.

De Graaf, J. and LUST (2004) Wat is cultureel kapitaal 'ons' waard? Veldwerk als methode. *Stedenbouw & Ruimtelijke Ordening* 85(4): 50–55.

De Jong, M. (2006) Imaginations for regional design, seeking for new concepts, visions and strategies for regional developments. Paper at the 2nd World Planning Schools Congress 'Planning for diversity and multiplicity: a new agenda for the world planning community', Global Planning Education Association Network, Mexico City, 12–16 July.

Faludi, A. (2000) The performance of spatial planning. *Planning Practice & Research* 15(4): 299–318.

Faludi, A. and Van der Valk, A. (1994) *Rule and order, Dutch planning doctrine in the 20th century*, GeoJournal Library 28. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Gallent, N., Shoard, M., Andersson, J., Oades, R. and Tudor, C. (2004) England's urban fringes: multi-functionality and planning. *Local Environment* 9 (3): 217–233.

Gulinck, H. and Dortmans, C. (1997) Neo-rurality: the Benelux as a workshop for new ideas about threatened rural areas. *Built Environment* 23(1): 37–46.

Hajer, M. (1995) *The politics of environmental discourse, ecological modernisation and the policy process*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hajer, M. (1996) Heterotopia Nederland of wat Bunnik mist, de cultuurpolitieke opgave voor de ruimtelijke ordening. *Stedenbouw & Ruimtelijke Ordening* 77(6): 4–10.

Hajer, M. and Reijndorp, A. (2001) *Op zoek naar nieuw publiek domein, analyse en strategie*. Rotterdam: Nai Uitgevers.

Halfacree, K. (2004). Rethinking 'rurality'. In T. Champion and G. Hugo (eds) *New forms of urbanisation, beyond the urban–rural dichotomy*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 255–304.

Hidding, M., Needham, D. and Wisserhof, J. (1998) *Stad en land, een programma voor fundamenteel-strategisch onderzoek*. Den Haag: Nationale Raad voor Landbouwkundig Onderzoek.

Kesteloot, C. (2003). Verstedelijking in Vlaanderen: problemen, kansen en uitdagingen voor het beleid in de 21e eeuw. In L. Schets (ed.) *De eeuw van de stad, over stadsrepublieken en rastersteden: voorstudies*. Brussels: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap-Project Stedenbeleid, pp. 15–39.

Leinfelder, H. (2007) *Open ruimte als publieke ruimte, dominante en alternatieve planningsdiscoursen ten aanzien van landbouw en open ruimte in een (Vlaamse) verstedelijkende context*. Gent: Academia Press.

Lofland, L. (1998) *The public realm, exploring the city's quintessential social territory*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

MacFarlane, R. (1998) What – or who – is rural Britain? *Town & Country Planning* 67(5): 184–188.

Madanipour, A. (2003) *Public and private spaces of the city*. London: Routledge.

Metz, T. (2002) *Pret! Leisure en landschap*. Rotterdam: Nai Uitgevers.

Meyer-Cech, K. and Seher, W. (2005) Periurban agriculture – rural planning affairs at the urban fringe. Paper at AESOP-congress 'The dream of a greater Europe', Association of European Schools of Planning, Vienna, 13–17 July.

Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap (2004) *Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen, gecoördineerde versie*. Brussels: Afdeling Ruimtelijke Planning.

Needham, B. (2003) Onmisbare toelatingsplanologie. *Stedenbouw & Ruimtelijke Ordening* 84(2): 39–43.

Overbeek, G. (2006) Theoretical and methodological framework. In G. Overbeek and I. Terluin (eds) *Rural areas under urban pressure, case studies of rural–urban relationships across Europe*. Wageningen: Landbouweconomisch Instituut, pp. 27–46.

Saey, P. (2005) Macht in de theorie van de planning, van zelfperceptie naar aporie en hoe het anders kan. *Ruimte & Planning* 25(3–4): 35–57.

Sandercock, L. (1998) *Towards Cosmopolis, planning for multicultural cities*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Selman, P. (2006) *Planning at the landscape scale*. London: Routledge.

Studiegroep Omgeving, Econnection and Buck Consultants International (2001) *Voorstudie voor het gewestelijk ruimtelijk uitvoeringsplan voor bosontwikkeling en bedrijvigheid tussen Gent en De Pinte*. Studie in opdracht van AROHM-Afdeling Ruimtelijke Planning.

Tummers, L. and Tummers-Zuurmond, J. (1997) *Het land in de stad, de stedenbouw van de grote agglomeratie*. Bussum: Uitgeverij THOTH.

Van Ark, R. (2005). *Planning, contract en commitment, naar een relationeel perspectief op gebiedscontracten in de ruimtelijke planning*. Delft: Eburon.

Van den Broeck, J. (2006). The Localising Agenda 21 Program, a 'trialogue' between visioning, action and co-production. Paper at 2nd World Planning Schools Congress 'Planning for diversity and multiplicity: a new agenda for the world planning community', Global Planning Education Association Network, Mexico City, 12–16 July.

Van der Valk, A. (2002). The Dutch planning experience. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 58: 201–210.

Van der Wouden, R. (2002). Meervoudig ruimtegebruik als culturele opgave, ontwikkelingen in de openbare ruimte. *NovaTerra* 2(2): 35–39.

Van Dooren, N. (1999). High Five, 'Gij zult netwerken', atelier over 'netwerksteden in de netwerksamenleving'. *Appendix to Stedenbouw & Ruimtelijke Ordening* 80(6): 24–29.

Van Tatenhove, J., Arts, B. and Leroy, P. (2000) Introduction. In J. Van Tatenhove, B. Arts and P. Leroy (eds) *Political modernisation and the environment, the renewal of environmental policy arrangements*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 1–15.

Verwest, F., Dammers, E. and Staffhorst, B. (2005) Ontwikkelingsplanologie: voorbij het poldermodel. *Ruimte in debat* 3(2): 2–9.

Voets, J. and De Rynck, F. (2006) Rescaling territorial governance: a Flemish perspective. *European Planning Studies* 14(7): 905–922.

Zonneveld, W. (2001) Een fraaie maar rommelige nota, het begin van het debat. *Stedenbouw & Ruimtelijke Ordening* 82(2): 42–45.

Zonneveld, W. (2005) Weinig conceptuele vernieuwing: over de nieuwe 'Nota Ruimte' in Nederland. *Ruimte & Planning* 25(2): 32–48.

18 THE RTPI LIBRARY SERIES

Regional Planning for Open Space

Edited by
Arnold van der Valk and Terry van Dijk

ROUTLEDGE

First published 2009
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Typeset in Akzidenz-Grotesk by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, UK
Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International, Ltd., Padstow, Cornwall

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Regional planning for open space/edited by Arnold van der Valk & Terry van Dijk.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-415-48003-1 (hbk : alk. paper) -- ISBN 978-0-203-35938-9 (ebk) 1. Regional planning. 2. Open spaces. I. Valk, Arnoud van der. II. Dijk, Terry van, 1975-
HT391.R344 2009
307.1'2--dc22
2008054183

ISBN10: 0-415-48003-5 (hbk)
ISBN10: 0-203-35938-0 (ebk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-48003-1 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-203-35938-9 (ebk)

RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

City regions typically have a structure of natural and agricultural landscapes in and around them. These open spaces are important for citizens to relax in, but without planning, they would soon be urbanised. Preservation of these landscapes is a complex interplay of government policies, legal regulations, subsidies and civil initiatives.

The debate on how to actually preserve open space in the context of a growing metropolis remains incomplete and fragmented, leading to a lack of clarity about the possibilities of different approaches. This book reviews various planning options in order to confront political rhetoric with grounded analysis. European and American experts critically examine the issues, including the liberalist discourse that urges the transfer of responsibility for open space from government to the market.

An international reflection on the merits of current and projected models of process-design in relation to preserving regional open spaces, this book scrutinises the connection between the dynamics in the open space and the planning institutions designed to implement policy. Providing region-specific practical insights in how to structure an open space problem, and case studies on valuation methods, this book also presents new ideas on alternative approaches.

Arnold van der Valk is Professor in Land Use Planning at Wageningen University, the Netherlands.

Terry van Dijk is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Spatial Sciences at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands.

URBAN PLANNING/URBAN STUDIES/GEOGRAPHY

Cover image: Courtesy of the authors.

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
www.routledge.com

an informa business

ISBN 978-0-415-48003-1

9 780415 480031